



VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network

VA E-mail News

Mission: To provide high quality, cost effective health care for America's veterans that exceeds their expectations and is enriched by outstanding research and education.
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Kenneth J. Clark, Network Director

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11-0, and was referred to the Committee on Appropriations. The Speaker of the California State Assembly, Herb J. Wesson, Jr., sponsored AB 2559, Veterans Home of California: Simultaneous Construction. Other homes would be constructed in Fresno and Redding Counties. The projects are eligible for federal matching funds – VA had committed \$55 million for the construction project and an additional \$29.6 million would be required in state funds - the total project is estimated to cost \$84.6 million. State funds would come from the Veterans Home Bond Fund of 2000. An “urgency clause” was inserted requiring that the legislative process would have to be completed and forwarded to Washington by August 15. The Governor and the California State Commanders Veterans Council supported the legislation. Read more at: <http://www.califveterans.com/vethomes.htm>

Check out these Web sites

Network 22 Internet Site:

<http://www.visn22.med.va.gov/>

VA Compensation & Pension Benefits:

<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/index.htm>

VA Memorial Benefits:

<http://www.cem.va.gov/>

VA Vocational Rehabilitation - Employment

<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/index.htm>

VA BENEFITS GUIDE NOW AVAILABLE IN SPANISH

VA's 2002 Benefits Guide is now available in Spanish at:
<http://www.va.gov/pubaff/fedben/Fedbensp.pdf>.

PACKAGE - CA STATE VETERANS BILLS PASS LEGISLATURE AUTHORIZES CONSTRUCTION OF VETERANS HOMES

A package of bills to authorize the simultaneous construction of 3 sites in Saticoy, Lancaster and West Los Angeles passed the California Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs on April 23 with a vote of

VA LAUNCHES INVENTORY OF CEMETERY MEMORIALS

VA began the first comprehensive inventory of an estimated 300 memorials at about 100 national cemeteries to coincide with the National Historic Preservation Week, May 12-14. VA is looking for volunteers, through September, to gather historical information and detailed descriptions of the memorials. Individual headstones and post 1960 text tablets are excluded from the inventory project, which will last through the year. Historic cemetery memorials include inscribed stone blocks, bronze tablets affixed to boulders, sundials, sarcophagi, obelisks, columns and the ubiquitous soldier standing atop a granite pedestal. Some, however, are substantial buildings such as the Medal of Honor Memorial in Riverside National Cemetery. The project will also offer essential information to support VA's goal of maintaining its cemeteries as the best in the world, an objective VA calls its "national shrine commitment." VA manages 120 national cemeteries as well as 33 government, soldiers' and Confederate lots in non-federal cemeteries throughout 41 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. VA employees are encouraged to volunteer for this noteworthy project. For more information go to: www.cem.va.gov.

VA HOSPITALS SCORE HIGH ON INDEPENDENT QUALITY SURVEYS

In one of the health care industry's top measurements of quality, the hospitals of VA scored slightly higher than their non-VA counterparts. The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) based the scores on surveys of VA health care facilities. JCAHO's hospital accreditation system is nationally recognized by the health care industry as a major, independent review of health care quality. VA's score was 93, nearly 2 points higher than the average for non-VA hospitals nationwide. Since 1952, JCAHO has conducted surveys every 3 years that cover all 163 VA hospitals on a rotating basis. Each of the 58 VA hospitals surveyed in 2001 received a full, three-year accreditation. All VA hospitals are fully accredited by JCAHO. VA's Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacies (CMOP), which dispense more than 65 million prescriptions a year to VA facilities and veterans, were accredited by JCAHO for the first time in 1999 and are scheduled for resurvey in 2002 – 6 of the 7 CMOP's achieved Accreditation with Commendation. VA was the first mail prescription service to be accredited by the Joint Commission. During the hospital accreditation process, JCAHO surveyors evaluate the credentialing of medical staff - nursing care - medical records - patient

services - monitoring and evaluation - laboratory and ambulatory care, among others.

VA TO RECEIVE E-GOV 2002 PIONEER AWARD

VA Web-based Virtual Learning Center (VLC) was chosen among 234 government programs to receive the prestigious E-Gov 2002 Pioneer Award. This is the highest award given by E-Gov, a coalition of public and private sector groups promoting innovative electronic approaches to government. VLC is a management tool for sharing information about new ideas and best practices across VA. Additionally, the program offers virtual mentoring opportunities by VA leaders, sharing their experiences and creates a forum for people to share professional interests and to exchange information. VLC's Intranet program was activated in 1997 and has expanded to the Internet in 1999. E-Gov brings together public sector and industry partners to identify the skills, applications and technology needed to help transform the way government does business. Check their website at: <http://www.va.gov/vlc>.

VA REEVALUATES GULF WAR DEATH RATES

A mortality study by VA scientists concerning veterans who served near the Iraqi munitions dump at Khamisiyah during the Gulf War indicated no substantial increase in deaths or any unusual causes of death due to an explosion. The study began after another VA report in February suggested a dramatic increase in deaths among a group of about 35,000 veterans serving in the Gulf area during the war. The most recent in-depth VA study based upon more current data, matched death records with the Social Security numbers of 134,379 veterans whom the DoD said might have been exposed to chemical weapons at Khamisiyah. The latest study found 368 deaths that weren't included in the February report, plus 650 deaths that were attributed earlier to the wrong group of veterans. When the errors were combined, they dramatically distorted the mortality pattern among Khamisiyah veterans. The latest study was based upon current information and a larger, more comprehensive pool of data from the National Death Index, compiled by the National Center for Health Statistics. The February report, involved matching VA records and DoD rosters of those service members notified that they were exposed to two different models of the chemical "plume" from Khamisiyah. To read the complete study: http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/docs/khamisiyahreport_1_1.pdf.

HOUSE APPROVES BILLS TO STRENGTHEN VA INFRASTRUCTURE

The House passed H.R. 4514, the Veterans' Major Medical Facilities Construction Act of 2002, which would authorize \$285 million for 10 major medical facility construction projects. Six are designed to mitigate against potential seismic problems, including facilities located in West Los Angeles, Long Beach and San Diego. In response to the new terrorist threat facing the United States, the House also approved legislation to expand VA's role in preventing and responding to biological, chemical and radiological terrorism threats. H.R. 3253, VA's Emergency Preparedness Research, Education and Bio-Terrorism Prevention Act of 2002 would authorize \$100 million over 5 years to establish at least 4 National Medical Emergency Preparedness Centers at VA medical centers to conduct bio-medical research on, and develop health care responses for chemical, biological and radiological threats to the public health and safety. The centers would also provide education, training and advice to VA and community healthcare professionals, as well as provide rapid response laboratory assistance to local health care and law enforcement authorities in the event of a national emergency.

DENTAL X-RAYS FOUND TO SCREEN FOR STROKE RISK

Besides searching for teeth-destroying cavities, dental X-rays have a potential new major use - showing whether a person is in imminent danger of a heart attack or stroke. Drs. Stanley N. Cohen, Professor of Neurology at UCLA and Arthur H. Friedlander, Associate Chief of Staff/Education at GLA, recently reported at the American Academy of Neurology, that a review of the medical records of 46 veterans, revealed that the presence of a calcified carotid artery on their panoramic dental radiograph indicated that the veterans were at high risk for a future myocardial infarct, stroke or for coronary artery surgery within 3 years. Carotid artery calcifications are calcium deposits that line the walls and partially block the flow of blood in the arteries that nourish the brain. A review of medical records of similarly aged veterans with related atherogenic risk factors (hypertension, cholesterol levels, obesity) revealed that they suffered these vascular events (myocardial infarct, etc.) significantly less often. In view of these findings, Cohen and Friedlander advised dentists and other health care professionals using panoramic radiographs to refer all patients with atheroma formation to a cardiologist for evaluation of the

extent of systemic atherosclerosis and control of aberrant risk factors.
(Thanks to Dr. Arthur H. Friedlander)

VETERANS - A CALL TO ARMS TO SUBMIT YOUR STORIES

For more than 225 years, millions of Americans have fought our country's wars to preserve freedom. Of the more than 24 million veterans still living, close to 1500 are lost every day. All veterans interested, may help carry on their legacy on film. Digital Ranch Productions have been recording and archiving personal stories of living U.S. wartime veterans from WWI through modern conflicts. "The Honor Project: Heroes of Our Nation on Record," can be accessed at <http://www.honorproject.com/>. The Honor Project is an official partner of the Library of Congress and ultimately will donate its archived audiotape library in its entirety to them through the Library's American Folklife Center. This project was designed to encourage Americans of all ages to collect first-person accounts of those men and women who defended America.

CARDIOLOGISTS RECONFIGURE GAUGE FOR HYPERTENSION

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is the most common medical condition in the United States, affecting more than 50 million Americans. Hypertension is one of the most important health issues in this country today and is the cause of, or major contributing factor in heart disease, strokes and kidney failure. Even when the blood pressure is quite high, a person may have no symptoms until a catastrophic event occurs. For this reason, hypertension is known as the "silent killer." Individuals at particular risk for developing hypertension are those who have a family history of high blood pressure, who are African American or who have high normal blood pressure readings. There are two components to blood pressure readings: systolic and diastolic. A person with a blood pressure of 160/92 has a systolic pressure of 160 (the higher number) and a diastolic pressure of 92 (lower number). In the past, physicians focused on elevated diastolic blood pressure in diagnosing and treating hypertension. Recent evidence shows that elevated systolic blood pressure is also associated with the development of complications. In fact, some studies have shown that a high systolic blood pressure is a greater risk for heart attacks and strokes than a high diastolic blood pressure. This is why practicing physicians view systolic hypertension as a serious issue and treat systolic hypertension, even in the absence

of diastolic hypertension. The foundation of hypertension treatment includes appropriate diet and lifestyle changes, such as reducing alcohol intake, exercising appropriately, quitting smoking, and losing weight. Nevertheless, many individuals, especially those with higher blood pressures, need medical treatment. Medications are effective in lowering blood pressure, but according to some surveys only 25% of individuals with hypertension have their blood pressure under control. A major cause for treatment failure in patients with recognized hypertension is poor adherence to medication treatment plans. Hypertension is a condition that is easily ignored because early in its course, it usually does not produce symptoms. As a result, there is no short-term incentive for taking medications because patients generally feel good enough. Patients may have problems taking their antihypertensive medicines because of various dosing of medications and a variety of side effects. Such issues need to be discussed with the patient's health care provider. The goal of the treatment of hypertension is to disarm this "silent killer" by lowering the blood pressure, thereby preventing the long-term ravages of hypertension, strokes, heart disease and kidney failure.

http://www.va.gov/resdev/queri/sdp_htn.cfm. (Thanks to Dr. Glenn Nagami)

ARMY DENTIST AWARDED MEDAL OF HONOR

President Bush posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor to former University of Southern California graduate and Army dentist, Benjamin Lewis Salomon. On July 7, 1944, at the Battle of Saipan, Captain Salomon single-handedly killed 98 enemy soldiers who attacked his aid tent filled with wounded U.S. troops. Captain Salomon ordered his comrades to evacuate the wounded men while he held off an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 Japanese troops. As the wounded men evacuated the tent, Captain Salomon was heard shouting, *"I'll hold them off until you get them to safety. See you later."* According to the citation, Salomon grabbed a rifle from a wounded soldier and ran out to face the enemy. After expending his ammunition, Captain Salomon took over a U.S. machine gun emplacement and began firing at the approaching Japanese soldiers. As best the Army could tell, Salomon was shot 24 times before he fell and more than 50 times after that. Captain Salomon died at his gun. What an extraordinary story.

NATIONAL VETERANS WHEELCHAIR GAMES COME TO CLEVELAND

More than 500 veterans will compete in the largest annual wheelchair sports event in the world – the 22nd National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Cleveland, OH, July 9-13. Presented by VA and the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), the games are open to all U.S. military veterans who use wheelchairs for sports competition due to spinal cord injuries, certain neurological conditions, amputations, or other mobility impairments. The Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center and the PVA Buckeye Chapter are hosting the games this year. Wheelchair sports play an important role in the lives of disabled people, and for many newly injured veterans, the Games are their first exposure to wheelchair athletics. Next year, VA's National Wheelchair Games will be held in Long Beach.

OBSCURE VETERAN FACT

Did you know that there are only 179 former military members in the House and Senate? There are 136 in the House and 43 in the Senate, which comprise around 35% of the entire Congress. You can read all the statistics, including active duty status, combat military retirees and what service and in which conflict members of Congress served at the website for the VA Committee at: <http://veterans.house.gov/vetinfo/vetsincongress.html>

If you know of any obscure fact or interesting information, please let us know and we may print. Please <mailto:david.katz3@med.va.gov>.